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Approved For Release 2007/03/06 : CIA-RDP79T00975A027700010002-2

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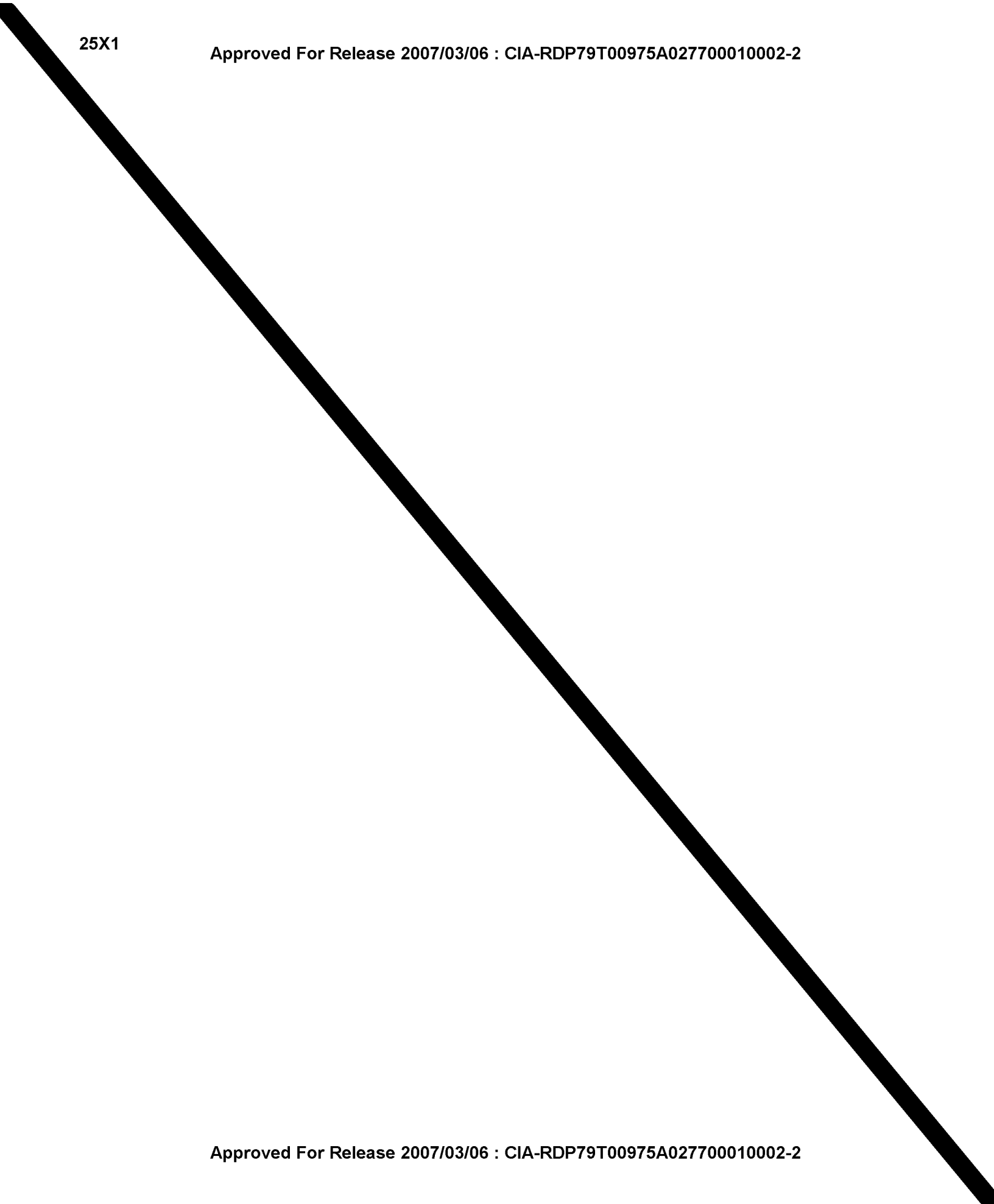

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CONTENTS

25X1 [redacted]

LAOS: Pathet Lao roll out the red carpet for King Savang's visit to Sam Neua. (Page 2)

USSR - MIDDLE EAST: Recent Soviet statements support Israel's right to exist. (Page 3)

PORTUGAL: Socialist Party leader Soares challenges military and Communists. (Page 4)

SPAIN: Reaction to Portuguese election. (Page 6)

25X1 [redacted]

GREECE-US: Joint communiqué on base negotiations focused on Greek demands in order to strengthen Karamanlis' image as a tough negotiator. (Page 8)

GREECE: Armed forces augmented by reserve call-up and increased draft. (Page 9)

25X1 [redacted]

ETHIOPIA: Student demonstrations have broken out in several areas. (Page 13)

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Approved For Release 2007/03/06 : CIA-RDP79T00975A027700010002-2

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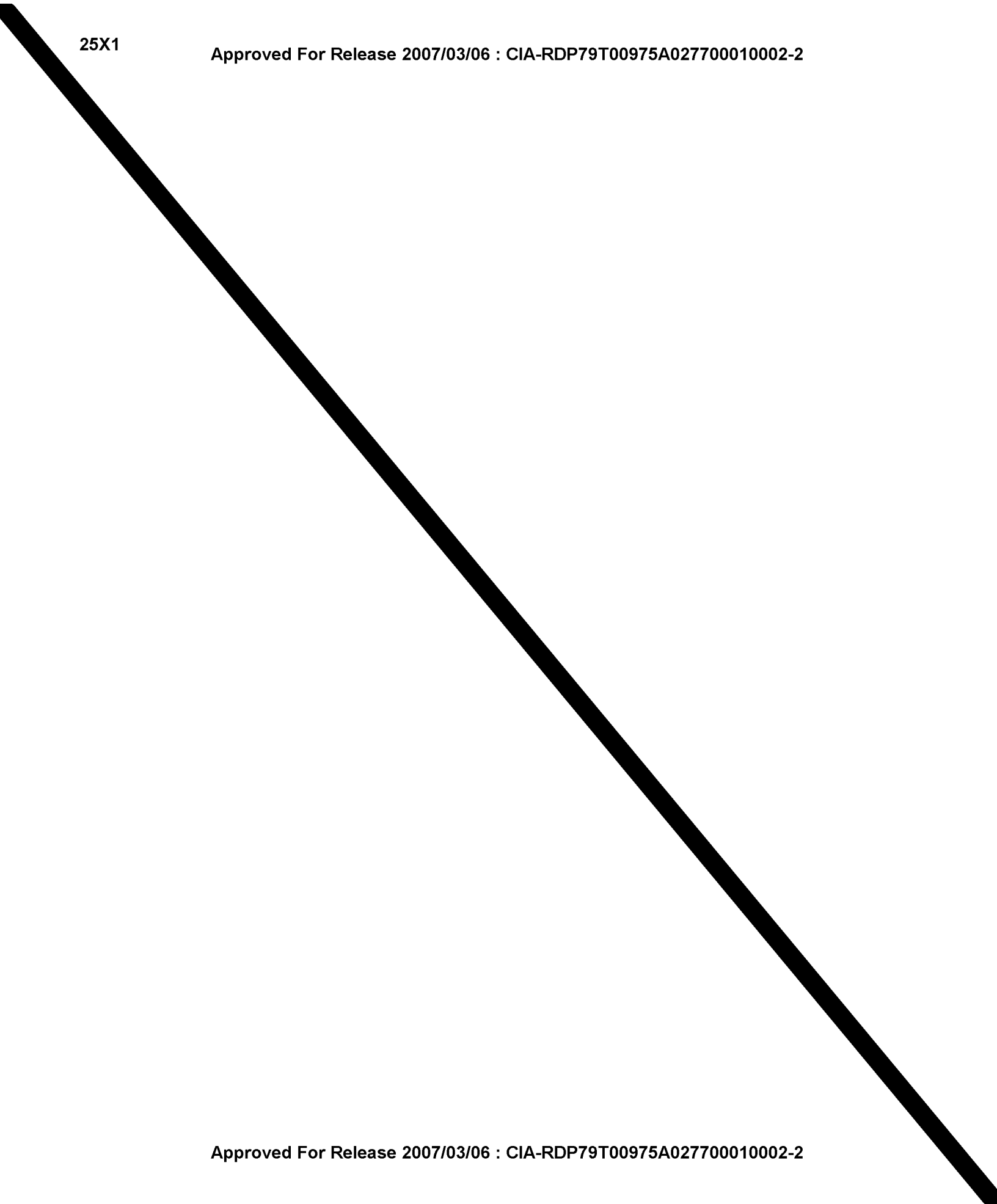
Approved For Release 2007/03/06 : CIA-RDP79T00975A027700010002-2



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LAOS

The US embassy in Vientiane reports that the Pathet Lao are rolling out the red carpet for King Savang, who is making an unprecedented official visit to Sam Neua and other areas in the communist-controlled zone. The King's 22-member party, which includes the Queen, other members of the royal family, and a number of senior coalition government officials, arrived at Lao communist headquarters on Monday for a week-long stay.

The most important power-brokers in the Lao communist movement, including Central Committee chairman Kaysone Phomvihan and his deputy, Nouhak Phoumsavan, greeted the King upon his arrival. Prince Souphanouvong, who issued the invitation for the visit on behalf of the Central Committee and who is in overall charge of festivities, delivered the keynote address at the highly emotional reception ceremony. The speech was reported to be strongly nationalistic, conciliatory in tone, and apparently contained no polemical tirades against non-communist Lao politicians and military leaders.

The Pathet Lao are also giving widespread and highly favorable coverage to the King's visit in their propaganda broadcasts. The broadcasts emphasize the playing of the Lao national anthem during reception ceremonies and the widespread display of national flags, hundreds of which were flown in from Luang Prabang for the occasion.

The opening phase of the royal visit suggests that both the King and his Pathet Lao hosts are trying to make this occasion a significant step toward national reconciliation. While it is still too early to tell if the visit will have any impact on the festering situation at Sala Phou Khoun, no significant military action has been reported there since the afternoon of April 28.

In any case, the major beneficiary of the King's visit will almost certainly be Souphanouvong. By closely identifying himself with the King, Souphanouvong stands to strengthen his credentials as a Lao nationalist and his claim to be Prime Minister Souvanna Phouma's logical successor.

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Approved For Release 2007/03/06 : CIA-RDP79T00975A027700010002-2

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Approved For Release 2007/03/06 : CIA-RDP79T00975A027700010002-2

USSR - MIDDLE EAST

Recent Soviet statements supporting Israel's right to exist appear designed to encourage bilateral contacts, as well as Israel's attendance at Geneva. Last Sunday, Israeli Foreign Minister Allon indicated that he thought Soviet Foreign Minister Gromyko's statements on Geneva were useful.

In a carefully balanced speech last week, Gromyko outlined Moscow's Middle East policy and affirmed the need to reconvene the Geneva conference. He called for liberation of Arab lands, ensuring the rights of Palestinians and the establishment of their own state, and guaranteeing the existence of all states in the region--including Israel. On the last point, Gromyko emphasized that the USSR is willing to offer Israel the strictest guarantee that it has every right to exist as a state, provided it withdraws from all occupied Arab territory.

Although Moscow has frequently indicated its interest in guaranteeing a settlement and has often asserted that it supports the continued existence of Israel, Gromyko's explicit assertion of these points in front of Syrian Foreign Minister Khaddam is noteworthy. It closely follows recently reported contacts in Israel between Soviet emissaries and high-level Israeli officials. In view of the deepening diplomatic isolation of Israel and its perception of a deterioration in relations with the US, Tel Aviv would probably welcome the flexibility that a new Soviet position might afford, even though a dialogue with the Soviets might arouse the opposition of Israeli conservatives.

The USSR, for its part, would like to project a more evenhanded position. Moscow would also like to establish closer contacts with Israel in order to play a greater role in Middle East diplomacy. The Soviets would be likely to take the line with the Arabs that, although it might require Moscow to make limited concessions to the Israelis, closer contact with Tel Aviv would give the Soviets greater leverage in any upcoming peace talks.

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Approved For Release 2007/03/06 : CIA-RDP79T00975A027700010002-2

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Approved For Release 2007/03/06 : CIA-RDP79T00975A027700010002-2 25X1

PORTUGAL

The head of the Portuguese Socialist Party, Mario Soares, appears to have taken a first step toward a post-election challenge of the ruling Armed Forces Movement and the influential Communist Party.

In an interview with a Lisbon newspaper on Monday, Soares, whose party won 38 percent of the vote, compared to 13 percent for the Communists, described the election last Friday as an "immense defeat" for the Moscow-backed Communist Party. He said the Communists had shown they lacked popular support on both the national and local levels.

Soares derided the Communists for obtaining such a small vote after a well-financed campaign in which they had "ten times more posters" than the Socialists. He implied that the Communists had exploited key positions in the government and the media to advance the party's campaign. Noting the Socialists' impressive strength among the working class, the Socialist leader chided the Communists for failing to gain as high a percentage of the vote as their counterparts in France and Italy.

Soares indirectly criticized the Movement by calling for prudence in Portugal's progress toward socialism. He warned against efforts to develop a brand of socialism that would isolate the country internationally. Such a policy, he said, would reduce Portugal to "a type of Albania," with no immediate prospect of improving the people's living standards.

The Socialist Party leader called for municipal elections to replace local leftist officials who seized office after the coup last April. The Movement has ignored all appeals by the moderate parties that these posts be filled through free elections.

These remarks are a departure from the conciliatory stand Soares adopted immediately after the election, when he publicly stated that the Socialists would not

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seek government changes and would continue to support military control of the government. His apparent shift in tactics may be a reaction to repeated efforts of both Movement spokesmen and the Communists to depict the moderates' impressive showing in the election as a victory for all parties on the left and an endorsement of present Movement policies.

Soares may also have been influenced by the runner-up Popular Democratic Party, which has criticized attempts by the Communists and the media to play down or distort the significance of the election results. The Popular Democrats maintain that the Portuguese voters have made a clear choice for a democratic form of socialism.

The Socialists face an uphill task in trying to translate their election victory into practical power. On the one hand, they want to make common cause with moderate officers in the Armed Forces Movement to reduce Communist and radical influence in the government. On the other, the Socialists want to avoid alienating the still-dominant radical Movement officers who may believe that the Socialists are pushing too hard. [redacted] 25X1

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SPAIN

The Spanish government has been very circumspect in commenting on the election in Portugal, but the Spanish media and politicians have played up the defeat of the dual myths of "Communist strength" and the "immaturity of the people."

Political commentators and opposition politicians in Spain are using the outcome to argue that if "underdeveloped Portugal" can have a nonviolent, honest election that resulted in a nonextremist majority, then no one should fear free elections in Spain. Opponents of the Franco regime reportedly plan to use the election as another argument to encourage the government to do more to further Prime Minister Arias' modest liberalization program.

Political observers note, however, that even though the Spanish government appears relieved by the strong showing of the Portuguese moderates, Madrid remains suspicious of Lisbon's policies and will not let the favorable election results influence its own domestic liberalization plans very much.

A high Spanish Foreign Ministry official has told a US embassy officer that the election outcome would permit consideration of a number of Spanish-Portuguese issues that had been held up pending the election. The source thought a meeting of the two foreign ministers might be held in June. A stumbling block could develop, however, over Lisbon's accusations that Spain is harboring a pro-Spinola Portuguese liberation army.

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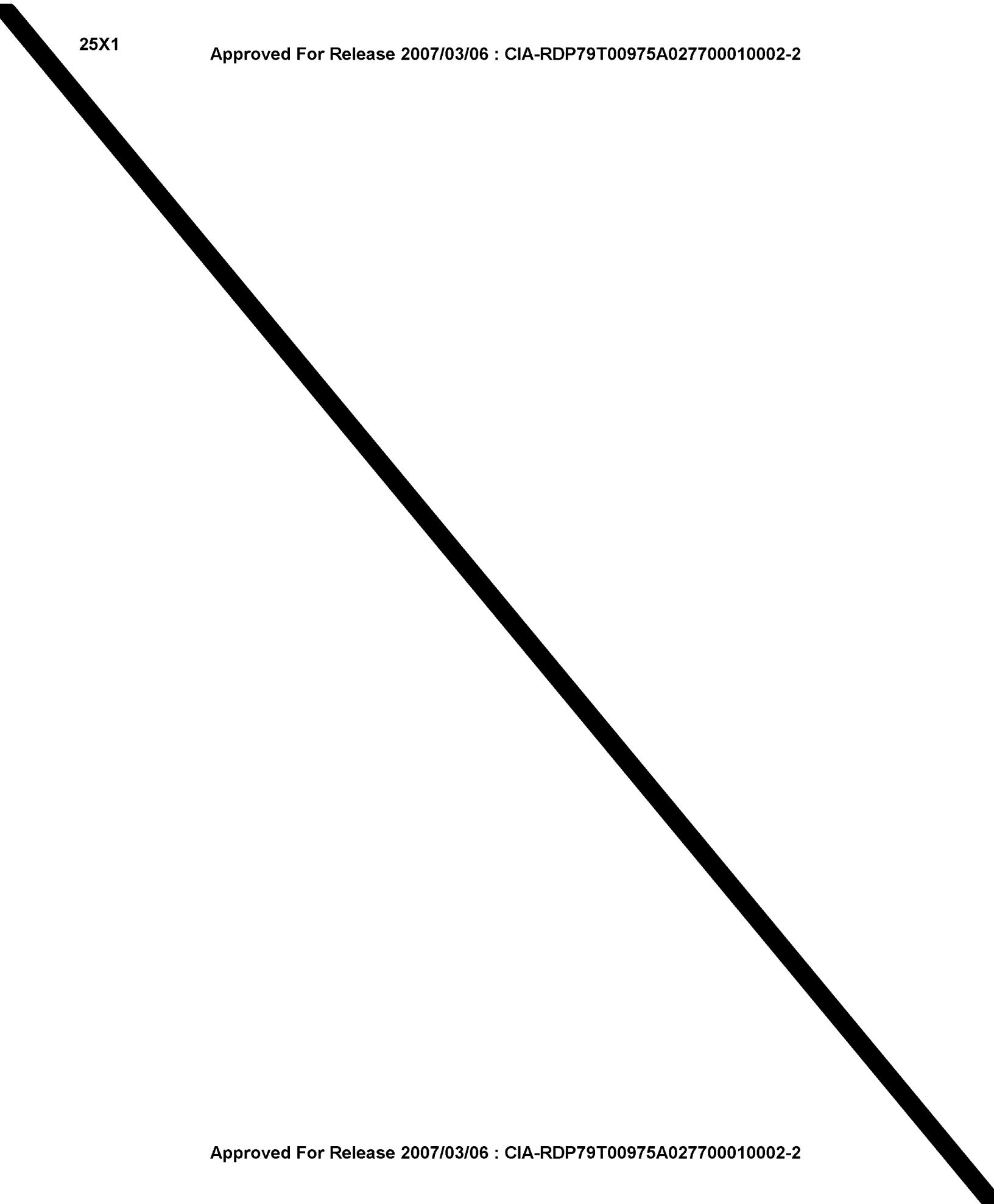

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GREECE-US

The joint communiqué released on April 29 reporting the results of the second round of the base negotiations carefully focused attention on Greek demands for US withdrawal and away from the more positive aspects of the negotiations. This emphasis reflects the political needs of Greek Prime Minister Karamanlis, who must project a public image of a tough negotiator in the talks.

The document states that the US, at Athens' request, has agreed to terminate homeporting in Greece for six destroyers of the US Sixth Fleet and to "close down" a US air force base at Hellenikon near Athens. US military facilities remaining in Greece will be placed under Greek commanders.

While the communiqué notes only that certain US facilities that contribute to Greek defense needs will continue to operate at Hellenikon air base, the Greeks have, in fact, agreed in principle to permit the retention of those facilities at Hellenikon that the US deems essential. The Greeks dropped their earlier demands that the US quit the base completely, as well as a later request that US personnel there be limited to 200. The phase out of US homeporting was a quid pro quo for the Hellenikon agreement, the details of which are not yet complete.

The talks were conducted in a cordial atmosphere, and the US embassy in Athens believes that the communiqué affords a reasonable compromise on points that have been at issue. Other US facilities, such as the telecommunications facility at Tatoi, will be discussed in subsequent talks.

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Approved For Release 2007/03/06 : CIA-RDP79T00975A027700010002-2

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Approved For Release 2007/03/06 : CIA-RDP79T00975A027700010002-2

GREECE

Athens is augmenting its armed forces by calling up reserves and increasing its draft call. According to a source of the US defense attaché, the armed forces are to be increased by 22,000, bringing the total Greek military strength to about 180,000 by mid-May.

The source reports that the additional men will be used to reinforce mainland forces, whose numbers have been reduced by the transfer of personnel to Aegean islands. We estimate that some 16,000 troops have been sent to eastern Aegean islands since last summer.

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Approved For Release 2007/03/06 : CIA-RDP79T00975A027700010002-2

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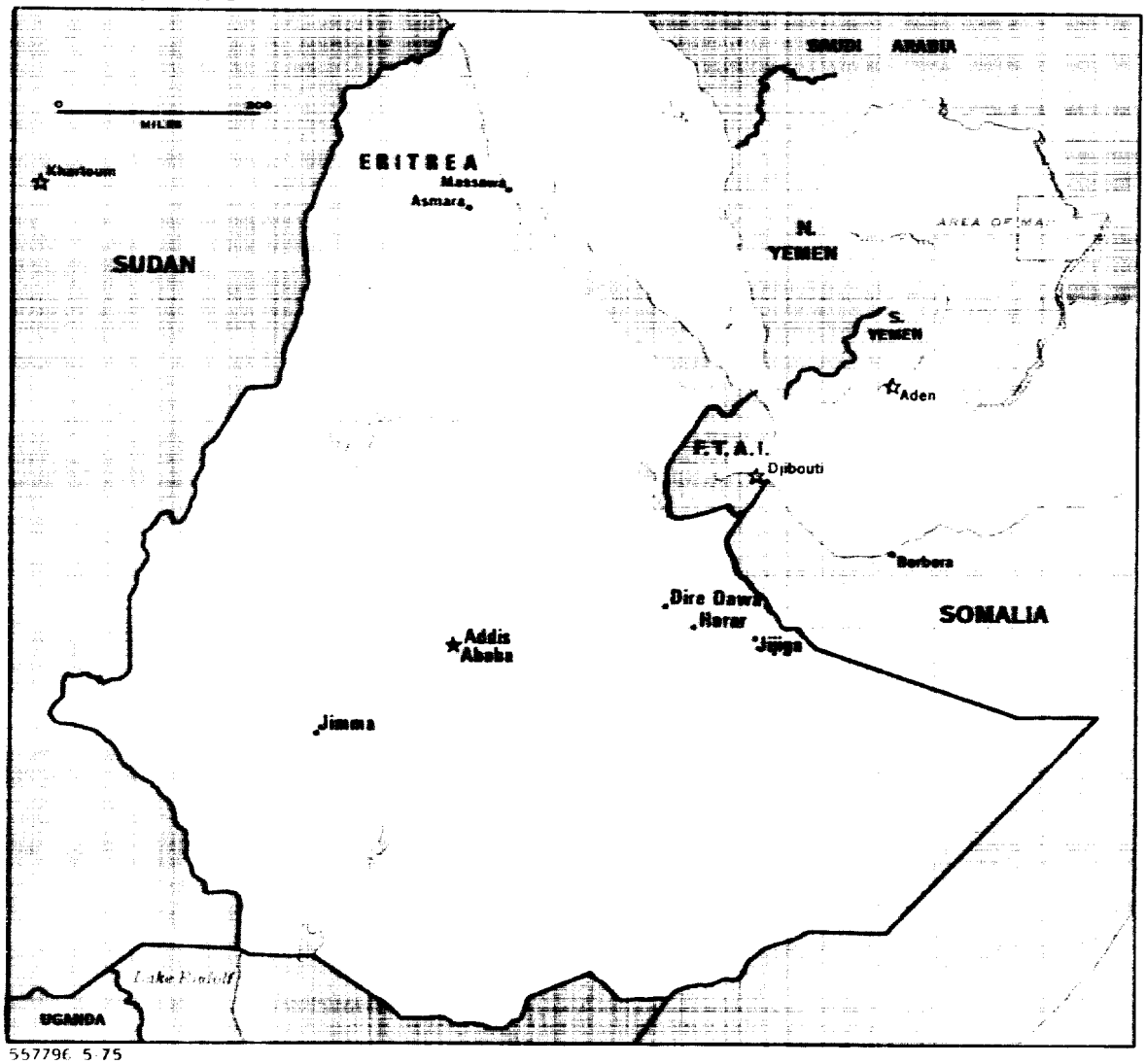
ETHIOPIA



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ETHIOPIA

Student disturbances, some reflecting political opposition to the ruling military council, have broken out in several areas. The student unrest comes at a time when the council's leadership is already being seriously challenged by disgruntled army elements.

Secondary school students in Addis Ababa went on strike Tuesday to protest the ruling council's authoritarianism. They denounced the council's limitations on freedom of assembly and the press and its attempts to propagandize the rural population in favor of its rule. They also criticized US financial assistance to he government. Some students have stoned cars, and four reportedly have been killed by police. Striking students in Dire Dawa and Harar in eastern Ethiopia have held similar demonstrations.

In several areas, students sent into the countryside as agents of the government's rural development campaign have instigated violence by encouraging peasants to seize land from landlords. Clashes involving peasants, landlords, and security forces have resulted in over two dozen deaths.

Many students were arrested Tuesday in Jimma, a provincial capital southwest of Addis Ababa, because local authorities believed the students were preparing to take over the city. Student campaigners in Jijiga, a town in eastern Ethiopia, were detained briefly for several days last week, presumably for stirring up trouble among the local peasants.

Meanwhile, conflicts within the regime, triggered by the arrest last week of some council members for reportedly plotting a coup, appear unresolved. Important army units are demanding changes in the council's land-reform program to permit limited private ownership. The US embassy has received reports that the Second Division, which is stationed in Eritrea, and the Third Division, which guards the border with Somalia,

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also are demanding that the council open negotiations with the Eritrean rebels and adopt a less authoritarian approach to policy-making.

These pressures may force the council to make some changes in its policies or membership. The council might be able to survive without such changes, but only at the risk of losing effective control over key army divisions in the provinces.

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